

MINUTES

**Fourth Quarterly Meeting of the
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION
Held, pursuant to notice
Monday, November 17, 2003 — 10:00 AM
1719 Southridge Drive, Jefferson City, MO**

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call
In attendance: **Chairman, Carl Niewoehner, Member Bernadette Miller, Member Emmett Fairfax, and Member Carson Ross.**
Excused absence: **Vice Chairman Donald Gralike**
- C. Introductions
Guests and staff present.
 - 1. Guests: **Jim Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Gary Williams**, Director Regional Office Dept. of Veterans Affairs; **Larry Daniels**, Adjutant DAV, Dept of MO; **Jack Matthews**, Pres. MO Veterans Commission Foundation; **Gary Campbell**, Director VA Medical Center Columbia; **Stephen Gaither**, Public Affairs Office Columbia VA Hospital.; **Chief Raphael Wahwassuck**, Commander DAV, Dept. of MO; **Lynn Harris**, DAV, Dept. of MO; **Ernie Lee**, Chairman MAVO; **Kyle Clower**, Elderly Advocate, Lt. Governor's Office; **Courtney Fadler**, Public Information, Lt. Governor's Office; **Lynn Dorrell**, Adjutant American Legion , Dept. of MO; **Rich Heigert**, Commander American Legion, Dept. of MO; **Charles Jackson**, Director, Dept. of Public Safety; **Julie Fox**, Deputy Director, Dept. of Public Safety;
 - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Lead Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Tim Norton**, Director of Properties; **Stan Baughn**, Service to Veterans Supervisor Southeast Region; **Jim Hurst**, Service to Veterans Supervisor Northeast Region, **Jerilyn Cornelius**, Administrative Assistant STV; **John Burgess**, Service to Veterans Supervisor Northwest Region; **Chuck Wooten**, Springfield Veterans Cemetery; **Bob Harvey**, Service to Veterans Supervisor St. Louis Region

- F. D. Approval of August 26, 2003 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded. Commissioner Fairfax made a motion to accept the minutes and Commissioner Ross seconded the motion.

II. OLD BUSINESS:

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Mr. Taylor advised the Commissioners of the Strategic Plan that was distributed and entertained any comments or suggestions.

FY03 Annual Report was distributed to the Commissioners for review. Any responses or suggestions should be directed to Jill Talken within the next week.

Mr. Taylor distributed article from Denver Post to Commissioners concerning 3 suspended amid claims of poor care at Colorado vets home.

Hal Dulle reported to the Commissioners on legislative issues for 2004 session:

Budget – Adequate funding in Homes so that MVC meets VA requirements on staffing.

License Plate – Survivor plates for relatives of those killed on active duty has some eligibility requirements concerns.

MAVO Legislative Committee will meet at 12:00 today. MAVO plans to introduce tax exemption bill and license plate bill. Commissioner Ross based his concerns about license plate fees.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

Homes Program – Census/Waiting List Statistics Report distributed. A summary of MVC annual conference was also included. The vendor's booth expense provided 100% funding for the conference.

Construction Update: Tim Norton, Director of Properties

Construction – Report Update November 27, 2003(attached). Mr. Norton reported that a pre-proposal meeting was held in Rolla in October regarding Fort Leonard Wood 160 acre potential cemetery site. Soil borings and report should be completed by mid January.

Mt. Vernon punch list for D and E wing has been completed and the remaining wings should be completed by the end of the year. Scheduled install of furniture

and equipment is set for January 5th. Shortly after the VA does final inspection a dedication date will be set.

St. Louis dementia wing completed initial punch list and we will re-check within the next couple of weeks the list of items as soon as the contractor indicates they are corrected. We will be moving the residents after December 19th. Phase II of the project will begin soon after.

Miscellaneous improvements at Mexico include erosion control issues, parking and street lighting. Project should be complete by the end of the year.

St. James lobby floor and storage room will be complete in the next few weeks. A pre-proposal meeting was held to discuss adding dining/activity room to dementia unit.

Warrensburg and Cameron Homes has concerns with cooling capacity. A pre-bid meeting on a chiller upgrade in both facilities will take place on November 24th.

A pre-application has been submitted to VA for 65% reimbursement for Cape Girardeau HAVC project. The project will consist of upgrading the heating, air conditioning and ventilating system. Also includes replacing flooring, renovating and expanding the kitchen, adding a solarium, dementia wing dining/activity room and painting the resident room walls.

St. Louis roof replacement project also includes adding security fencing and replacing exterior doors. Pre-application to VA has been submitted for 65% federal reimbursement.

Springfield Cemetery is adding a new 900 niche columbarium wall due to the growing interest with the existing 540 niche wall that is estimated to be filled by 2005. Federal reimbursement of this project will be 100%.

A new design has been completed for the St. Louis Home entrance project. We anticipate bidding the project in late spring and award as soon as the funds are available.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Service to Veterans – Sharon Keith reported the STV officers are keeping busy participating in Supermarkets and Veterans Week in Branson along with the 35% increase in comp/pension claims processed from 2002 to 2003. James Whitfield expressed his concerns to Ms. Keith about the STV officers increased workload. Ms. Keith advised that the Service Officer Supervisors will be meeting over the next two days.

Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

Cemetery Program – Jess Rasmussen reported to the Commissioners that they are anticipating a total of 2,000 burials by end of November 2003 and to exceed 8,000 pre-registrations (report attached) with the opening of the two new cemeteries.

Higginsville Cemetery recently hosted training for the Kansas Cemetery Director.

Mr. Rasmussen will be attending a the Dedication Ceremony at Kentucky State Veterans Cemetery.

Mr. Rasmussen will be attending a VA Cemetery Network Conference in Indianapolis in December.

Scott Gebhardtshauer, Department of Veterans Affairs is impressed with what Missouri is doing and is referring other states to Missouri as a role model.

Congressman Skelton toured the Higginsville Cemetery recently.

Commissioner Ross advised he recently traveled to New Franklin and visited the Veterans Memorial that was funded by the community and not built with grant money.

Col. Wayne Medley reported a total of 29,462 ceremonies have been performed since 1999 which is an average of 640 per month. The 30,000 ceremony is being planned to take place at Jacksonville. They will soon be getting Hannibal Honors Team ready, two teams in West Plains, one team in Kirksville and looking into a team in the St. Joseph and Maryville areas.

The ceremonial bugler has received positive reactions from families. The Military Funeral Honors Program has concerns about all the deployments which effects live buglers.

VSO Grants: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

VSO Grant Program- Mr. Taylor reported over the first two years of the Grant program there has been a clear indication that it has helped support the Service organizations efforts to assist additional veterans. There was a 33% increase in claims from organizations. The entire \$750,000 will be spent from the VSO fund this year.

Lynn Dorrell, American Legion advised the grant has allowed their service officers to participate in Supermarkets and publish an additional ad in the Legion Newspaper advertising veteran assistance.

Larry Daniels, DAV advised the grants helped to purchase the mobile van last year which travels around to communities to offer assistance to veterans.

Charles Jackson, Director, Dept. of Public Safety advised he has no budget items to report to the Commission from the Governor's office at this time. Mr. Jackson plans to attend a Supermarket. He has also been working with Ron on benefits for incarcerated Veterans. Mr. Jackson introduced Julie Fox to the Commission. Ms. Fox is the Deputy Director for the Dept. of Public Safety.

Gary Williams, Director Regional Office Dept. of Veterans Affairs reported they are receiving a significant increase in claims coming in. He reported 1,525 disability claims in October which is a total of 150 -200 more a month. Since the increase there has also been a 10% increase in appeals received.

Commissioner Ross advised he currently serves on the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans and that the Committee on the national level is looking into the VA appeals decisions.

Commissioner Miller asked if recent news notification regarding children of veterans exposed to Agent Orange has increased in claim work. Lynn Harris, DAV and Bob Harvey MVC both informed her there has been no recent increase and advised these claims are sent directly to Denver for action.

Steve Gaither, Public Affairs Office Columbia VA Hospital reported they finished the fiscal year and the hospital is currently caring for 28,400 patients and the outpatient workload in the hospital and the 5 clinics has also risen, more than 201,000 patients were treated which is a total of 16% increase over the previous year.

Pending Projects include two cardiac catheterization labs to be replaced in FY2004. They will be the first in Central MO with a new digital applications process per Mr. Gaither.

Mr. Gaither reported they are moving forward with a research grant in their Radio Pharmaceuticals Research Laboratory which is a collaboration effort with University of MO; School of Medicine, Veterinary School, Reactor and some of the other departments. This \$2.5 million research grant will be used for imaging equipment. This is an increase from the previous \$1 million grant.

Columbia VA Hospital is currently operating appointments by if the veteran has a service connected condition or immediate medical condition when they enroll they are seen for their first appointment within 30 days. If the veteran doesn't meet these categories the wait is 6 months for the first appointment. There is no waiting list at this time.

Jack Matthews, MVC Foundation, Inc. reported the Foundation met today and voted to proceed with plans for the 3rd Annual "Chipping in for Veterans" Golf

Tournament. Raffle tickets are still available. The winner will be announced at Veterans Appreciation Day at the Capitol Building in January.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Ralph Durnbaugh, Director

VBATF – Ralph Durnbaugh updated the Commission on the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. Charts were distributed (attached) showing the monthly summary of MVC calls to the toll free number. Over 5,000 calls have been received and nearly 3, 500 calls have been good leads referred to Service Officers. Mr. Durnbaugh explained the toll free number computer process, routing procedure by zip code, and region referral to the Commissioners.

Benefits Supermarkets – Mr. Durnbaugh informed the Commissioners over the past year the Supermarkets have been targeted in the minority veteran areas. The Supermarket Attendance List (attached) indicates that the attendance for these areas has been low. He explained specific efforts where made in advertising the events and free transportation was provided. Commissioner Ross advised he has some ideas to approach this issue.

The current situation is that 40% of Missouri's veterans live in St. Louis City, St. Louis County and Jackson County – but they receive only 26% of the VA benefits paid in the state. A meeting will be held on Tuesday with the Lt. Governor's office to discuss advertising methods for future Supermarkets.

The Supermarket originally scheduled in St. Joseph for November has been rescheduled for January 24 due to the request of the local committee.

A Supermarket will held in Jefferson City on April 8. Mr. Durnbaugh is working to organize a committee and hold its first planning meeting in December. If anyone knows of volunteers interested in assisting with the Supermarket please contact him.

April 24th a Supermarket will be held in conjunction with Kirksville's Veterans Appreciation Day hosted by DAV.

Ron Taylor advised to the Commissioners a letter regarding the Swan Lake Cemetery in Kansas City was forwarded to Attorney General Jay Nixon on October 15th requesting an investigation on the legality of the misleading advertisements. The status to date is that the case is under investigation and they have not reached a conclusion. Any additional complaints received may be sent to the Attorney General's Office, Consumers Protection Section or may be sent to MVC and we will forward them.

Commissioner Fairfax asked Ron Taylor to check on the signage on Hwy 50 for the Warrensburg Veterans Home. Mr. Taylor advised that a request had previously been made and Tim Norton will check with MODOT on the status.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

Ron Taylor informed the Commissioners that previous legislation passed by the General Assembly on the Korean Conflict Medallion Program states the Missouri Veterans Commission shall design the form of the Korean Conflict medallion, medal and the certificate and forward the approved designs to the Adjutant General for distribution. A copy of the medal was distributed (attached) along with the original and a short description of the design and the reasons for the design. Mr. Taylor also explained that after surveying some Korean War Veterans it was decided to continue with the red/white/blue ribbon for the medal. Commissioner Ross made a motion to proceed with the design proposed. Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

Steve Gaither announced to the Commissioners the National Veterans Wheelchair Games will take place this year June 15-19 in St. Louis, MO. This is the largest wheelchair athletic event in the world with approximately 500 to 600 veterans participating. This will be an opportunity for the entire state to focus on this special group of veterans coming from all over the country and a team from Great Britain. He explained approximately 2,500 volunteers are needed for this event. The Commissioners advised they will take this issue up at the next Commission meeting in January.

Budget - Ron Taylor discussed the critical budget issues facing the Commission. He explained the two most critical are related the Homes Program.

- 1) Adequate staffing for the Homes – believed we can get into Governor’s recommendations.
- 2) Pay for Homes staff – competing salaries for licensed staff and CNA’s. Issues hiring new people and they leave after a few months for higher pay.

A discussion was held regarding the state could be subject to repayment of the federal grants used to build the homes if we are not meeting the required number of beds for operation. A 10% resident rate increase for resident charge would bring the maximum rate to \$1,587. Approximately 89% of the residents are currently paying the maximum charge now. This will generate 1 to 1.2 million dollars per year and still leave Missouri below other states. Ron Taylor and Hal Dulle will be meeting with David Cosgrove, Chief Legal Council Governor’s office to discuss these budget issues.

Hal Dulle advised that MVC would not be revisiting the VCCITF this next session and feels the VCCITF has sufficient funding at this time. They will be looking into getting appropriation authority to move monies from the Trust Fund into the Home Fund.

Strategic Plan – Ron Taylor announced the Strategic Plan for 2002 -2006 was distributed to the Commissioners for review. Any responses or suggestions should be directed to Jill Talken within the next few weeks. The plan will be completed in January.

Chairman Niewoehner read aloud a letter received from Arnold Theobald in reference to the Homes Program mission statement. The Commissioners voiced their disliking of the letter that Mr. Thoebald sent to the Commission.

Election of Officers – Chairman Niewoehner advised the Commissioners due to his previous ill health he will not be seeking re-election for Chairmanship on the Commission. Chairman Niewoehner noted he was thankful for everything over the last three years he served as Chairman and thanked the staff for their support. Commissioner Ross thanked Chairman Niewoehner for his passion and how appreciative they are for his service. Chairman Niewoehner then opened for nominations for the Chairmanship. Commissioner Ross nominated Emmett Fairfax as Chairman. Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously. Nominations were then accepted for the Vice Chairman. Commissioner Miller nominated Carson Ross as Vice Chairman. Commissioner Fairfax seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Niewoehner announced the next Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 22nd from 10:00- 12:00 at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Jefferson City. MAVO will meet on January 22 at 1:30.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.



Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary